

John 68 – The Suffering Christ

11/09/2025

Scripture 1: (Jn. 12:34-50 ESV)

So the crowd answered him, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?"

So Jesus said to them, "The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them.

Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them." Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.

Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

And Jesus cried out and said, "Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment-- what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me."

Scripture 2: (Isa. 52:13-53:12 ESV)

Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you-- his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind-- so shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.

Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned-- every one-- to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out

of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

Sermon:

Jesus said, *“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”* (Jn. 12:32 ESV) to which the crowd responded, questioning *“How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up?”*

The Greek term translated as “lifted up” is the word *upsio*. It was used to mean in a literal sense to “lift up, physically”, or in a figurative sense as “to exalt”. This same expression was notably used to translate the prophet Isaiah's description of the LORD's “Suffering Servant” into Greek, *“Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.”*. Again, their response demonstrates the crowd's lack of understanding (in the midst of their knowledge) about Who the Christ really is.

They expected Him to be a great warrior, a revolutionary, and a leader of men. They expected Him to be a Davidic king who would drive out the Romans. But they forgot that the most important role for a leader, any leader, is to be a servant. The role of every Godly king is to serve his people: to serve them by working for their best interest; to serve them by protecting and defending them; to serve them by making sacrifices for them (even at the cost of their own life, if necessary); to serve them as God's representative, serving the LORD, Who is the king's greater Sovereign leige-lord (Deuteronomy 17:14-20; 1 Samuel 12:13-15; Psalm 23; Romans 13:1-5). They forgot that the most important role and duty of any christ: whether as a prophet, priest, or king; is as God's servant for the people. They forgot, or they failed to understand, that the defining role of the expected Christ would be as the LORD's servant; one like Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5), but greater (Deuteronomy 18:15-19).

- So, while they were correct to understand the Christ as the eternal Davidic King, they failed to understand that He also would be the LORD's eternal Servant.
- So, they could not understand that He would be the Servant whom the LORD had decreed must suffer on behalf of His people.

John tells us, *“Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”*

Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.” Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.”, explaining that none of this was unexpected; that it was actually planned, from before the beginning.

Despite Jesus having performed so many Signs (with seven Signs notably highlighted by John), the Jews still did not believe in Him. They had all the knowledge necessary: the words of the prophets, the Law of Moses, the only inspired and authoritative self-revelation of the LORD. They had all the tools necessary to read and understand these “clues” to solve the mystery of Christ, at least, they had all the tools except for the Holy Spirit.

- God chose to not reveal the truth to them, so that they could not believe.
- The LORD blinded them spiritually, hardening their hearts so that they would not believe and be healed.

As harsh and difficult as we might think that sounds, we need to understand that it is sourced in the LORD's Sovereignty and in His Providential Will. Before we object or claim that it was (or is) unfair or unjust of God to do this to them, we must remind ourselves that:

- Salvation is a gift solely of God's grace and mercy. It is not a matter of Justice. It is non-justice, not injustice. Our salvation is unearned and undeserved; we have no right to it or any claim upon it, except whatever right our God-given faith in Jesus Christ grants us.
- The knowledge of God, His self-revelation, is also an pure act of His grace. The LORD is unknowable personally, except through Him condescending to be in relation with His creation.

Remember, God is required to save no one. The LORD was not obligated to make Himself known to us, or to anyone. He is under no compulsion or obligation to anything but His own decreed will: His ineffable purpose and plan; His gracious covenants. But, if someone ever wanted to make an argument in favor of human choice or, for our freedom and ability to choose God (to choose faith in Jesus Christ) through our own decision-making and will alone, then the example of the 1st Century Jews should be able to make and defend the case, if possible.

- They grew up trusting in the fulfillment of all the LORD's promises.
- They possessed the fullest revelation (to date) about God and His plan of salvation.
- They knew the text Scripture by memory, frontwards and backwards, better than most anyone.
- They had all the information necessary to know who God is and to recognize His handiwork.
- They saw the miraculous evidences performed by Jesus. They witnessed and experienced things which were impossible for a mere man.
- But, despite all of this, they were unable and unwilling to believe it, though they should have.

They were as “set up for success” to believe, as any human person could have been, but they could not believe. Believing Jesus, believing in Jesus, based on the available evidence, should have been the most rational and reasonable choice for any thinking, Jewish person. Therefore, the only logical explanation for why they did not, is that they were inhibited and prevented from believing. They were blinded by God, by the moral deficit created by Adam's and their own sin. Their only hope of coming to the light lay in the bright shining of the light. It lay entirely in the exercise of God's revealing power to drive away the darkness.

“Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.” Now, even though some of the authorities, men like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, were becoming convinced about Jesus, they were still not yet believing in Him confidently enough. They were still lacking the convictional courage to take the final step and publicly profess their faith. They did not have the necessary, consequential faith to prove their regeneration.

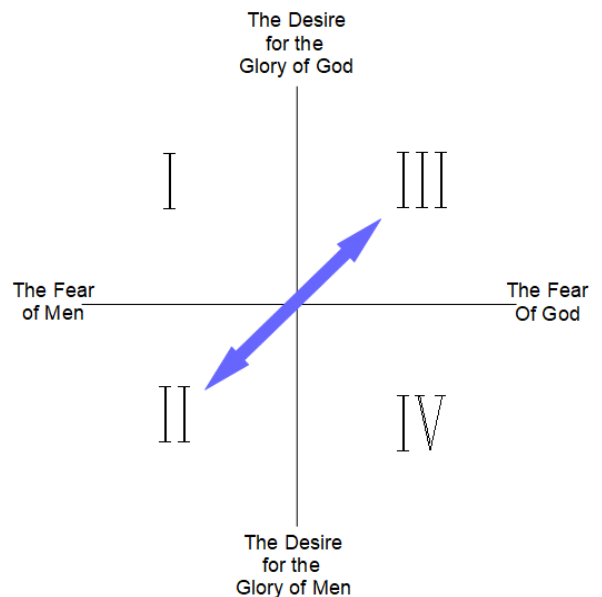
They had the right “head knowledge”, but were lacking in “heart knowledge”. The Apostle Paul tells us that, *“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says, ‘Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.**” (Rom. 10:4-10 ESV). They were still enslaved to the Law by their fear of men. Meanwhile, the Word was very near to them indeed. They were standing in the presence of the *Logos* who is *Theos*, but though they were knowing the Word, they could not confess the Word. They were still bound under the Law, as their Teacher and Guardian (Galatians 3:21-26). They were not yet set free by the grace about to be given; a grace of righteousness that would only be given after justice was satisfied.*

Although the Evangelist commends some of the “*authorities*” for believing Jesus, he also condemned them for their half-heartedness. Doing this, he identifies four categories that together describe their problem; a problem which we still suffer from.

- Stating, “*for fear of the Pharisees*”, he describes the first two categories, one as fearing “the reproach of men” and the other as fearing “the reproach of God”.
- Stating, “*for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.*”, he describes the second two categories, as desiring “the glory that comes from men” and the other as desiring “the glory that comes from God”.

These categories may be charted along two axes:

- the “fear of men” stretching from the left to the “fear of God” on the right, along the X-axis; and,
- the “desire for the glory of men” from the bottom up to the “desire for the glory of God” along the Y-axis.



Every person's spiritual attitude or condition may be plotted somewhere within one of the four quadrants created by these axes' division. Your Left/Right position is determined by the degree you fear the reproach of God or people, while your Up/Down position is determined by your degree of preference for the glory that comes either from God or from people.

Please take a moment and consider for yourself, where you think you might be on this chart (the chart shown in your bulletin). <PAUSE>

Now, let us consider what each of these four categorical extremes mean or look like.

The Fear of Men – What do we actually fear from other people?

- We fear their rejection or exclusion of us.
- We fear others taking advantage of us.
- We fear whether or not they “like” us.

- We fear their hatred of us and the consequences which stem from that.
- We fear what they may do to us; how they may harm us and abuse us: physically, mentally, emotionally.
- We fear them killing us.

The Fear of God – What do we fear from God?

- We may fear His judgment and condemnation for our sins.
- We may fear the “pain” caused by the application of His discipline, as to His beloved children (Hebrew 12:6).
- We may “fear Him” by honoring and revering Him simply because of Who and What He is, and because of His positional status, in relation to all reality, as the unique, universally Sovereign, Creator God; as the ultimate focus of the Fifth Commandment. Regardless, we should fear God out of our love for God.

Yet before we continue and consider the axis of “Desire for Glory”, we need to understand what biblical glory is and I would encourage each of us to keep this in mind as we consider what “glory” we desire most.

- The Hebrew term for “glory” is *kaveyd* and, as an adjective, it carries the sense of “heavy” or “weightiness”. To have glory meant to “be expansive” and to “have great significance”. A consequence of having glory was being given deference and preference. To be glorified meant to be invested with “credibility” and “great value” would be attributed to their opinion. When the glorified one spoke, they were listened to, trusted, and presumed to be the most correct.
- The Greek term for “glory” is *doxa* and, as an adjective, it describes a sense of radiant brightness or splendor. Glory is beautiful greatness. Glory draws and attracts honor and praise to itself. Glory was irresistible in its radiance and attractiveness. It inspires a desire to approach while also forcibly repelling everything less than it.

Desire for the Glory of Men – What kind of glory might we receive from other people?

- We receive fame and fortune, or power and influence.
- We become popular.
- Despite generally being negative, another form of glory we might receive from others is fear, notoriety, or even infamy.
- We become the beneficiaries of unasked-for favors.
- They quickly move to get out of our way; to make our way easier or faster.
- People bow and scrape when we walk by.

Desire for the Glory of God – What is the glory that we receive from God?

- God's own glory because, the glory of the Son is the glory of the Father (John 17:5, 22); a glory that never diminishes.
- This is a glory shared among all Three Persons of the Trinity and it is a glory shared from Jesus Christ to His adopted brothers and sisters as an equal glory.

Now, if we plot a line running from the bottom left corner to the upper right, then we will identify an “ideal” spectrum of faith demonstrating how the more a person “fears the reproach of God”, the more they will desire God's glory; while the more a person “desires the glory of Men”, demonstrates how little they will “fear the reproach of God” and how much more they will fear the reproach of Men, instead. But few, if any, persons are found perfectly on this line. Everyone is somewhere above it or below it. So, where do you think you are? <PAUSE>

Returning to our text, let us plot where certain Biblical figures may have been. The Evangelist tells us, about the Jewish authorities who were beginning to believe in Jesus as the Christ, that “*for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it*”. Their silence suggests that their “Fear of Men” was greater than or equal to their “Fear of God”, thus they would be just left of the center mark of the X-axis {if their “Fear of God” was greater than their “Fear of Men” their position would be positive, negative if reversed} at best, and since he tells us that “*they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God*”, then they would be somewhere in Quadrant II.

Similarly, the disciples, based on their reaction to the events surrounding Jesus's arrest, trial, and execution, were also left of center on the X-axis {since their “Fear” of the Jews was strong enough to “cancel out” or “override” their “Fear of God”}.

- Peter would proclaim the strength of his confidence in the LORD, his willingness to die for Jesus but, then the overwhelming power of his fear would be proven in his denial (John 13:36-38).
- The disciples would be found by Jesus, on the day His resurrection, gathered together in a room, locking themselves away “*for fear of the Jews*” (Jn. 20:19 ESV); locked up to keep the world that they were fearing, outside.
- The “sons of thunder”, James and John (the Evangelist) had recently demonstrated the strength of their desire for “the Glory of Men”, by begging their mother to ask Jesus to set them at His right and left, when He would come into His kingdom (Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45).

So, which spiritual Quadrant are you living in?

- Do you “Fear Men”, do you fear the reproach of other people more than you “Fear God”, more than you “Love God”?
- Is your desire for the “Glory of Men”, for the things of this world, greater than your desire for the “Glory of God”, greater than your desire to glorify God?

These are serious questions and they should cause each of us a serious gut-check because our answer defines how we respond to the world around us. But even the disciples, at this recorded moment in time, were no better off (spiritually) than the other believing Jews, despite their proximity to Jesus. So, if you are considering yourself to be somewhere within quadrants I, II, or even IV, then please understand that you are not alone and trust that good news and hope are coming for you.

Alternatively,

- Abraham, the greatest of the Patriarchs and the foremost Jewish “saint” was likely in Quadrant III, despite having claimed his wife as his sister, to save his own skin, he obediently leaving his kith and kin back in Ur and Haran to become a nomadic wanderer in Canaan, and he demonstrated his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac, the “child of promise” (Galatians 4:28), at the Lord's command, all because “*...he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.*” (Heb. 11:10 ESV). So, his “Fear of God” and his “Desire for God's Glory” seem like a net positive.

- Moses, the original “Servant of the LORD”, was surely deeper into Quadrant III. Moses begged the LORD, “*Please show me your glory.*” (Exod. 33:18 ESV) and after he was shown a glimpse, he did not retreat, showing the strength of his desire for God's glory. Similarly, his “Fear of God” was surely greater than his “Fear of Men” because he obeyed the LORD by presenting himself before Pharaoh, despite being an exiled murderer.

However, neither Abraham nor Moses were able to make it there on their own. They could not do it alone. They could not have the faith necessary, nor be obedient enough because of sin's restraint. Both men did enough things wrong in their lives {Technically, Abraham was in an incestuous marriage with his half-sister Sarah and he committed adultery (even though encouraged and permitted by Sarah) with Hagar, while Moses had (justifiably) murdered an Egyptian.} that they could never do enough good to balance out their scales, much less tip them in their favor, even if such a system of works-based, meritorious righteousness worked.

We cannot remove sin's corruption from our soul. We cannot successfully cover it over. We cannot undo our spiritual damage; the damage we do and the damage done to us. We cannot “take it back” and there are no “do overs”. We actually do get what we deserve. We sin, therefore, we're all sinners and “...*the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” (Rom. 6:23 ESV). That “free gift” is the only thing that can get someone out of Quadrant I, II, or IV into Quadrant III; a gift given only because of what the eternal, “suffering Christ” has done for us. Our spiritual condition, the conviction and courageous strength of our faith, can only be improved to the point of becoming saving faith is through the Holy Spirit's gift of such faith and His application of the atoning work of Jesus Christ, as our substitute.

We cannot convince ourselves, nor anybody else, about the truth of God revealed in Scripture and revealed in the Person of God's Son. It is illogical, irrational, and utterly unreasonable...from a worldly point of view. Paul writes, “*For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”*” (1 Cor. 1:18-19 ESV). And also, “*For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*” (1 Cor. 1:22-24 ESV). However, to those who are given a Christ-centered point of view, a Biblical point of view, then salvation by grace through faith alone is not only reasonable, rational, and logical, but it is quickly recognized as the only possible solution to the problem of our sin.

When we receive that grace, we are transformed and in our regeneration, moved up into Quadrant III where our faith: our “Fear of God” and our “Desire for God's Glory” rules our whole life. While history records all of the Apostles' deaths by martyrdom, Scripture records the best and most encouraging example for us in the murder of Stephen. Stephen, a Deacon of the Church, died testifying to the Gospel and confessing his trust in Jesus Christ (Acts 6:8-7:60). He demonstrated, through the circumstances of his death, that he had no “Fear of Men” and that he desired only the “Glory of God”. That kind of courageous and convicted faith is what a living, Spirit transformed heart looks like.

The Evangelist identified Jesus, in this passage, as the Suffering Christ when he directed us back to the prophet Isaiah, “...so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “*Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?*” Therefore they could not believe.”. He explained that God had blinded the Jews and was keeping them blind so that they would not “...see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn...” because if they did, then God would surely heal them. But, this divinely imposed blindness was not done out of hate or cruelty, but as loving discipline. Their and our spiritual blindness is a consequence of sin; it is a punishment for sin {its continuation and worsen is a type of “giving over”, ala Romans 1:24}; and, it is a part of the LORD's plan for our salvation. Thus, to better

understand the godly work which justifies the Elect through the righteousness of faith, the Evangelist wants us to recognize the Christ, as the LORD's Suffering Servant, described by Isaiah.

The prophesied Suffering Christ is described as:

- *“despised and rejected by men”*
 - The Jewish leaders: all of the Priests and their fellow conspirators; plainly hated Jesus. They rejected His teaching while His own disciple, Judas, betrayed Him to His death.
- *“a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”*
 - Jesus suffered and experienced all of the ordinary sorrows of life, even grieving the untimely death of His close friend, Lazarus.
- *“as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”*
 - Although many people called Him “Rabbi”, when it mattered most, the people who had welcomed Jesus with acclamation, turned away from Him. The man who was born to be King, was executed as the worst of criminals: beaten, scourged, mocked, and crucified naked in the hot Judean sun.
- *“they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death”*
 - The Romans unjustly executed Him alongside and between murderers and thieves.
 - He was buried in a brand new, unused tomb belonging to a member of the Jewish Council (Matthew 27:57-60)

That is what their “spiritual blindness” did to Jesus. They caused Jesus to suffer the worst “reproach of men” but, He did not fear them because He feared the LORD, God His Father, infinitely more. Yes, He was nervous about it, apprehensive about having to go through it all (John 12:27) but, He did not fear those men or their reproach. That is why He did not open *“...his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”*

yet while we considered Him to be stricken, smitten, and afflicted by God,

- *“he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows”*
- *“he was pierced for our transgressions”*
- *“he was crushed for our iniquities”*
- *“upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,”*
- *“and with his wounds we are healed.”*

Jesus did not suffer all of this for nought, that is the Good News. Jesus suffered all of this in our place. He suffered all of this in my place. Jesus suffered all of this in your place...if you believe Him and have put your full faith and trust in Him, alone; if you have been moved into Quadrant III.

This is the doctrine of Penal Substitutionary Atonement (Leviticus 16). This is one of the most important, fundamental doctrines that a Christian must believe. This doctrine is considered to be one of the five, most essential¹ doctrines of our faith, along with the inerrancy and authority of Scripture, Jesus' birth by the virgin Mary, Jesus' physical bodily resurrection, and the full, eternal deity of Jesus (as proven through the veracity of His miracles).

¹<https://www.pcahistory.org/documents/deliverance.html>

Penal means “punishment”. Jesus willingly chose to suffer punishment for sin.

Substitutionary means “in the place of”. Jesus willingly chose to suffer punishment for sins that He did not commit; that He was not guilty of. We committed them and we are the guilty ones. The guilt for our sin was imputed to Him.

Atonement means “restoration”. Jesus suffered the fullness of divine wrath that we deserve. There is no further wrath reserved for us. It would be unjust for God to now punish us for sins that He has already punished Jesus for, in our place. Now His righteousness, His guiltless-ness is imputed to us, so that now we may be restored to fellowship and friendship with God, our heavenly Father, if we believe Christ and have put our full faith and trust in Jesus Christ, alone.

This doctrine is what the Jews and the crowd failed to understand.

- While the crowd rightly understood that the Christ would be Israel's King, and that He would belong to the line of David, they failed to understand the necessity of His divinity.
- While the crowd rightly understood that the Christ would be eternal and, as King, that His reign would be unending, they failed to understand the fullness or truth of His eternality.
- While the crowd understood that the Christ would be their mediator and federal representative before the LORD, they failed to understand that as King, as the LORD's Servant, He would personally suffer the fullness of God's wrath on their behalf.

Jesus suffered the full “Reproach of Men”, so that we need never fear it, ever again. Jesus forsook the “Glory of Men”, so that we may desire and receive the “Glory of God”. Jesus helps us to “Fear God” more than anything else; to honor and revere God above all creation; to love God as our Father in heaven, because He has always loved us first.

Believing, regenerate Christians spiritually dwell safely in Quadrant III. Although we are still tempted to “Fear Men”, we will never succumb so far as to be dragged back into Quadrant I. Although we are still tempted by the “Glory of Men”, we will never fall so far, that it overpowers our desire for God's glory. Instead, through the Holy Spirit's help and our cooperation in His work of sanctification, we will always be moving forward and upward: fearing God and desiring His glory, more and more. Forever. Until Christ returns and beyond the world's ending.

AMEN